



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## A GOOD WAY TO TEACH HISTORY

---

LOTTA A. CLARK

The Charlestown High School, Boston, Mass.

---

During the past year or so, I have seen a boy of three talk over the telephone; a boy of five entertained at his birthday party by a vaudeville artist and fed by a fashionable caterer; a boy of nine tell his father the cause of trouble in the automobile and name each machine passed on the road; and a boy of sixteen make and operate successfully a wireless telegraph. No one can say that our American children do not keep abreast of the times, as far as amusements are concerned at any rate. We often hear the remark, "How much more children have now than they had forty years ago!" This is obvious, of course, and yet the opposite statement is just as true and more significant, "Children have less now than they had forty years ago."

As far as amusements are concerned there is no comparison. The poorest city children scrape together enough pennies to visit the cheap theaters; the parents of the middle classes, remembering the scant joy of their own childhood, strain every nerve to give their children as much as possible; while the sons and daughters of the rich leave few pleasures untasted when they are out of their teens. ( But the thing which children lack nowadays is the power or desire to take even a small part in the responsibilities of life. They have been brought up to receive, and have lost sight of the blessedness of giving. Parents share their pleasures with their children, but they shield them too long from the responsibilities which descend upon them cruelly and find them unprepared when they have to depend upon themselves. Forty years ago the youngest members of the family had their chores to do. These increased as they grew older and thus capability for useful helpfulness was bred into them from their earliest years. School was enjoyed for a few weeks when home duties permitted, but the real business of living was learned at home.

Most of our successful men and women of today look back upon a childhood in which they learned "to turn their hand" at whatever was needed. When these men receive our boys and girls in business, they complain bitterly of the lack of capability so evident in a large majority of our young people. Naturally they blame the schools and wonder how the years can have been spent in the fine buildings whose equipments so far surpass what they had in their own youth. One man asks, "Why is it that boy after boy that I try in my office can neither talk, write, nor reckon with any degree of accuracy? What have they been doing in school for thirteen years?" Another man who is at the head of one of the largest concerns in the country says, "I believe the time boys spend in the high school is entirely wasted! Give me a boy from the grammar school and I will make him worth something in four years, but these boys who have spent that time in the high school are not *able to do* anything!" We hear this complaint on every hand.

Uninviting as it may be, the teacher of today has got to face the following problem: Given children who have not been brought up to be helpful and obedient, to graduate capable, self-reliant, law-respecting young citizens! We cannot bring city boys up on farms, we cannot demand that parents teach their children to obey, neither can we expect them to do hard rough work in homes that are furnished with "all the modern improvements." Yet capability and obedience were never of greater value than they are today. They are the demand of business and of society and the schools must furnish them or be counted as failures.

But when we turn to the schools, do we find that they have recognized this? Do they furnish a different sort of training to supplement the child's home life, as they used to do? We have crowded the course of study with many subjects and increased the amount of work all along the line, and in order to cover all the ground the teacher feels she must plan all the details, utilize every moment, and hurry the children through the work as fast as possible. It is quite evident that under such conditions there is little time or opportunity for children to gain power in action or

in judgment such as is expected of them in the world of work to which they are going.

Five years ago, after having taught history in the high school for six years, I determined to have the courage of my convictions for one year at least and to give my pupils a fair chance to take the responsibility of their work and to do it in their own way. Up to this time I had conducted my lessons in the usual way, had planned the lesson beforehand, collected what illustrative material I could, and in the class had asked the questions, explained the difficulties, and carried the burden of the work on my shoulders. The pupils had answered the questions but rarely asked any, and had had no chance to get the real benefit of being responsible for the continuity and progress of the work, nor to plan, investigate, or discuss it on their own account. I determined that the class should be a social group of young people and should have an opportunity to do just those things, i. e., to co-operate—to work together—and to give each individual a chance to do *anything* which he *particularly wanted* to do.

It seemed impossible at first to get a chance to try this group work; the conditions in the high school make it difficult. Instead of having the same pupils for five hours each day, we have a different set every hour and they are with us but forty-five minutes. Some of these classes we see only three times a week, and as a number of them are preparing for college and normal school there is not a moment to be wasted. Furthermore, I did not feel warranted in trying any experiment which would unsettle the classes and make them harder to control in other recitations.

In spite of all this, however, I determined to give the social-group work a fair trial. I talked the matter over with the classes, showed them why the lessons we had been having were unsatisfactory, and asked them how they would like to try the experiment of running their history lessons themselves. The novelty of the idea pleased them and after considerable informal discussion we decided to carry on our recitations in the form of business meetings such as any group of people would have who had come together to accomplish a piece of work. A chairman was appointed from the class and there was something of a sensation

when I exchanged chairs with him. He appointed a committee to nominate candidates for president, vice-president, and secretary. These officers were elected by ballot for one month and their duties were decided upon by the class and written down in a simple constitution. We had an amusing time when they tried to decide what they ought to do with me. I told them I should do just as little as possible in the class in order that they might have all the time and opportunity there was. They finally decided to call me "the executive officer" with power to exercise full authority if necessity required.

It was surprising to see the change in the whole atmosphere of the recitations which this order of things brought about. The pupils were timid at first and I trembled for the result, but after a lesson or two they became used to it and the work went on with far more ease and spirit than I had dared to hope it would. Here is a brief sketch of the new kind of recitation.

(1) The president called the class to order and called the roll.

(2) He asked for the secretary's report, which was corrected by the class and formally accepted.

(3) The president asked if there were any unfinished business. If so that was taken up first; if not,

(4) The lesson of the day was called for. Whoever wished to, arose, addressed the chair, and began to describe the historical events in the lesson. If he made a mistake or omitted anything, another pupil who noticed it arose, and, when recognized by the president, made the corrections he thought necessary. Sometimes these corrections were not correct or did not go far enough and several others entered into the discussion. When there were several pupils on the floor at once, the one who was recognized first by the president had the right-of-way and the others had to do the same in turn. That prevented disorder. This part of the work proved to be of great value. The pupils questioned each others' statements and when they could not agree, the point was left over as unfinished business until the next day. In the meantime they consulted authorities to be able to prove their points, and they used their reasoning powers to good advantage.

There were all sorts of unexpected, interesting developments

as the work went on. Whenever difficulties arose we solved them together. My opinion was considered of no more importance than theirs. When we did not agree, I urged them to try their way so that they might have confidence in their own judgment if they succeeded, or see its weakness if they failed. Sometimes they elected officers who were not efficient and who bungled matters uncomfortably. The pupils suffered immediately and got some pointed lessons in civil government at first hand.

To tell all this sounds as if it must have taken a great deal of time. As a matter of fact we soon found that we had time to spare. The time which previously had been taken up by the teacher's questions was all saved and the pupils could easily recite in half an hour what it had taken them an hour to prepare. The reports of the secretary helped considerably with the review work, and as the class grew more critical of both the history and the English of these reports, the secretaries grew more careful and very often we had reports read with which no fault could be found. The roll-call and report were sometimes finished in five minutes, the lesson of the day in thirty more, and we found ourselves with ten minutes to spare.

There were various suggestions as to what we had better do with the extra time. One was that they take longer lessons, and this led us into the habit of letting them assign their own lessons, and they almost always took longer ones than I had been in the habit of assigning them. Another suggestion was that the scholars collect pictures and show them to the class during spare minutes. One boy said he didn't have much luck finding pictures, but he would like to read things in other books and tell them to the class. A girl asked if she might draw some pictures from a book in the library, and another boy asked me to get permission for him to take photographs at the Art Museum of the casts that related to our work. We did all these things and many more, and these suggestions led to the richest development of all in the work of that year. They formed themselves into little volunteer clubs, met at recess and after school, and considered what they could do to contribute things of interest to the lessons. There were drawing clubs, camera clubs, and the club that brought in

pictures and newspaper clippings, and gave interesting accounts which they had read, called themselves the "Sidelights Club." We used the last half of the last lesson each week for the reports of these clubs. They all did well for beginners, but the work of the drawing clubs was truly remarkable. Never before have I had such beautiful illustrative material. A point worth noting is, that some of the finest drawings were made by the poorest talkers.

The Sidelights Club did some fine work too. They always had more to give than the time allowed. One boy who had tried several times without success to get a chance to talk asked me, "Do you suppose I shall ever get a chance to tell what I've found about the vestal virgins?" I told him to keep on trying and finally he found his chance. Another boy wanted to describe a Roman house. He felt the need of a large plan to show the class, and, as he could not draw himself, he asked one of the girls in the drawing club to help him. She made him a fine pen-and-ink sketch of the ground-plan of a Roman villa. Still another boy had been to considerable trouble to get a certain collection of Pliny's letters from the central library. He had read one of the letters describing the eruption of Vesuvius to the class, and some time afterward he said to me, "If we have time today may I read another letter from Pliny?" "Isn't that book overdue?" I asked. "Yes," he answered, "but there's another letter in it that the rest ought to hear," and he was willing to pay the fine that they might hear it.

The discipline of these three classes was the easiest I ever had and became almost entirely unnecessary as the year went on.

On one memorable occasion a boy forgot himself and was severely reprimanded by the teacher. The next day the secretary described the whole occurrence minutely in her report. It nearly took my breath away and met with a storm of protest from the class. We had the report carefully re-read and on finding that every word of it was perfectly true and proper, the class accepted it and it was placed on file with the rest. There was no more unsatisfactory conduct to report in that class.

And what was the teacher's part in this new order of things? She was learning the truth of the statement that "no teacher is

equal to the dynamic force of the class before her." Her time and energy were taxed to the utmost to utilize all that the pupils produced, to help to get materials for them, to find and suggest books to be consulted, and to give them credit for the work done.

Our history work was finished two weeks before school closed and the extra time was spent in debates, reporting items of interest, and in making the notebooks which they were to take home as rich and attractive as possible. As the time to close came, I felt that I had never done such a satisfactory year's work, and in all the classes the pupils asked if they might not be allowed to continue their work the next year in the same way.

The following year we tried the same method in our graduating classes which were studying United States history and civil government. Each class is free to organize itself as it wishes and this class modeled its meetings according to a town meeting which we visited early in the year, and they got a fine understanding of this simple and efficient form of government. They elected a chairman and secretary every week in order that every member of the class might benefit by the experience of holding these offices.

There were several very critical pupils in this class and very rarely did a mistake in history or in English escape without a challenge. Criticism by one of his own age means more to a boy than the criticism of a teacher and he does not accept it unless he is convinced that he is wrong. Sometimes the pupil who was corrected insisted that he was right and read the passage from the book on which he had based his statement. There were half a dozen different kinds of books used in the class and as they often differed in statement this led to comparison, keen discussion, and careful judgment by the class before they came to a conclusion. It was decided that good criticisms and corrections deserved as much credit as description of events, and as time went on the pupils were very careful not to make mistakes. On one occasion, when there was a distinguished visitor in the room, the teacher did not open her lips and the class carried on their



work and discussion for forty minutes and there was not a single mistake in English.

When anything came up in the discussion which was not thoroughly understood anyone who wanted an explanation felt at liberty to ask for it. For instance, the class was discussing the Erie Canal one day when Monroe's administration was the subject of the lesson. A girl arose and said, "Mr. President, I wish someone would explain to me how that canal works; I do not understand it at all." Several other girls nodded in sympathy. A boy answered, "It works by hydraulic pressure." "But just what is hydraulic pressure?" asked the girl. "I'll have to make a drawing to show it," said the boy. He went to the board and, after making the drawing, he succeeded in explaining it so the girls understood the principle very well. "Now how does the hydraulic pressure work at the canal?" was the final question. Several boys tried to answer this but none could make it clear, so they agreed to study it out more carefully and report at the next lesson. This they did quite to the satisfaction of all.

The pleasure which we got in studying town government at first hand encouraged us to try more of the civil-government work in the same way. We had the state and city elections in our class. Previous to each election we found out what was being done in preparation for it. In connection with the city election, this brought up the question of the primary election and the Luce law. We found we could get no help from our textbooks on these subjects, so the class-secretary wrote to Mr. Luce and asked him for a copy of his law. He sent us not only what we had asked for, but also some interesting literature in regard to the law and told us where we could get more if we needed it.

After discussing how such things should be done, the class divided itself into two wards, appointed the proper officers, and every pupil registered exactly as he would if he were a voter. The voting lists were typewritten and placed on the bulletin board and when voting day came and the voters of Massachusetts were at the polls, each of our pupils had a ballot which he had copied from a sample, and was ready for our voting. They all raised their desk covers and retired within their desks as far as

possible while marking their ballots. This was the best imitation of the Australian system which they could devise and it answered very well. They next deposited their votes in proper order in sealed ballot-boxes and the polls were closed. The ward officers counted the votes, wrote the results on the board and the election was declared.

The same thing was done several weeks later when the city election took place. The pupils entered into the spirit of the thing, posted pictures of their favorite candidates on the bulletin board, and brought in interesting newspaper and magazine articles about them. It all seemed very real even to the teacher, and if those boys and girls do not vote when they are of age it will not be because they do not know how.

The written work in these classes consisted of keeping notebooks which were used for reference and review; of making topical and block outlines and diagrams; and of written essays and tests. It was planned to develop the pupil's power of investigation, of independent handling of his historical material, and a clear and forcible expression of what he had to say about it.

During the past year or two the classes have taken up the work very easily and have undertaken some things which we were not able to do before. We had a Current Event Club which interested us very much by its report on the Jamestown Exposition. A discussion arose as to whether there is a town of Jamestown now. In a similar way the question came up as to whether or not William and Mary's college is still in existence. One of our best histories stated that it is not, but some good evidence was brought in on both sides. Finally a girl in the club volunteered to write to the high school in Portsmouth, Va., and ask both questions. A letter came back promptly and in addition to the information we had asked, they sent us a plan of the Exposition and some pictures of historic interest. These were posted on the bulletin board and were enjoyed by all. We corrected the error in our textbooks!

The letter from Portsmouth suggested the idea of a Correspondence Club. Our school stands on the Bunker Hill battle ground. After we had finished studying about the battle and had

gathered all the historical material possible, we incorporated what we had learned in a series of letters which were illustrated by maps and photographs furnished by the Camera Club. These letters were sent not only to Portsmouth but to Detroit, New York City, and to London, England. We have received very entertaining letters in return which described places of historic interest also.

One of the most important and successful pieces of work done by these groups was done by the Library Club. It consisted of twelve pupils who went to the public library once a week and read there, among old and rare volumes and newspapers, interesting things about the early history of their home, Charlestown. They learned many helpful things which they reported to the class and used as material in the school paper. But toward the end of the winter they made the most interesting discovery of all. They found that John Harvard was a citizen of Charlestown. Like many people they had always associated Harvard with Cambridge, and were amazed to find that the Harvard grant and the site of the home were only a stone's throw from the place where they were studying. They dropped their books and started out to find it and after some searching and calculation, they found the place which is now occupied by a brick apartment house. Surprise was expressed that the place had never been marked and the half-laughing suggestion was made that "we mark it." The occurrence was reported to the class the next day and they discussed the different phases of it. They decided that they would like a granite tablet bearing the following inscription,

SITE OF THE HOME OF  
JOHN HARVARD  
1637  
MARKED BY THE HISTORY CLUB  
OF THE  
CHARLESTOWN HIGH SCHOOL  
1907

and they determined to get it if they possibly could. They planned together and worked at it for two months and encountered the many difficulties and perplexities which real work always brings. At one point the teacher was offered the money

to pay for the tablet, but she refused it because she was unwilling to deprive the young people of the joy of achievement or the disappointment of failure. Every pupil worked and did what he could, whether it was much or little, and the tablet was procured and unveiled on their graduation day.

Before closing I want to answer two questions which are almost invariably asked by visitors to these classes and which undoubtedly will occur to the mind of the reader. The first is, "How do you mark this work in order to send home the required bi-monthly reports to the parents?" and the second is, "What do you do with the laggards?"

The teacher's record-book contains a list of the pupil's names and several blank columns headed: Information, Judgment, Logical Arrangement, Special Work, Written Work, Notebooks. As each pupil recites the teacher credits him with his work by drawing a short vertical line in one of these columns. Sometimes several of these credits are given for specially good work. At the end of two months these credits are added up. The highest number sets the standard and one-half of this number is considered necessary to pass. One-half of the best ranks as C, and from this the B's and A's are ranked up and the D, E, F are ranked down. The pupils understand this thoroughly and may consult the record-book at any time and many of them keep track of their work from week to week. In a small modern-history class this year, each pupil reports on Friday the work he has done during the week and states how many credits he thinks he deserves. The class takes a vote upon it. Sometimes they award him more, sometimes less, but usually they agree, and so far their judgment has agreed with that of the teacher.

The boys and girls understand the working of the scheme perfectly and appreciate the fact that in order to get ahead all they need to do is to work. When several pupils are failing the teacher asks the class, "Can we do anything to help them to succeed?" Sometimes they offer to allow these pupils to have the first chance to recite, but as they know that the opportunity is equal for all they often refuse to allow this. Usually the laggards rouse themselves and show they are able to do as well as the rest.

In extreme cases the lesson for the coming day is learned by the pupils before they go home and two or three such periods of preparation have proved sufficient for the poorest of them.

The experiment, begun five years ago, has not only justified itself but is bearing the richest fruits. The past and the present are welded together; the school problems are solved as the world's problems are; can there be any truer preparation for the future of our young makers of history?